

January 3, 2003

**ND COMMISSION ON DRUG & ALCOHOL ABUSE RELEASES REPORT -
THREE-YEAR PLAN DETAILS FINDINGS FROM PUBLIC
FORUMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTION
TREATMENT, AND ENFORCEMENT.**

BISMARCK – In a joint news conference held today, Governor John Hoeven and Commission Chair Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem, along with several members of the commission, announced the release of the *Comprehensive Three-Year Plan for Prevention, Treatment and Enforcement*, detailing the commission's findings and recommendations.

Formed in early 2002 by executive order signed by Governor Hoeven, the commission was charged with evaluating substance abuse in North Dakota by a) exploring the interrelationship among substance abuse prevention, treatment and enforcement programs; b) designing procedures to coordinate resources in the substance abuse area; and c) pursuing avenues to ensure future coordination of resources designed to address substance abuse issues.

"As the Commission listened to special reports on programming from commission members and third-party resources, the idea of a statewide strategy addressing all three areas began to take shape. Utilizing the existing substance abuse prevention five-year plan as a guide, the Commission decided to expand the existing plan to include strategies for treatment and enforcement," said Stenehjem. The existing plan was developed by the Department of Human Services and focused on prevention issues in each of the eight human service regions.

Developing the new comprehensive plan involved the coordination of nine public forums – one in each human service region, and one with representatives from each of the tribal communities. Nearly 600 citizens representing a broad spectrum of expertise attended the public forums. Participants included almost 60 students, professionals from the enforcement, treatment and prevention communities, concerned citizens and representatives from the tribal community. They provided the Commission with ideas about needed changes, information regarding successful programs, and a call to improve services in almost all aspects of substance abuse prevention, treatment and enforcement.

From these forums, the Commission made the following findings:

- The three disciplines - prevention, treatment and law enforcement - must work together; and communities as a whole must be involved.
- Prevention education of our children only works if it starts early and is continuous through college.

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- Collaborative efforts in communities are key in helping combat substance abuse at all age levels.

- Addiction must be viewed as a disease requiring long-term, on-going treatment, with insurance companies providing more flexibility in coverage.
- Rural access to treatment facilities is critical and presently is not available in many areas of the state.
- The State must make it harder to manufacture methamphetamine through more aggressive laws dealing with containers, purchase of certain ingredients, and enhanced penalties for offenders possessing firearms and drugs.

The comprehensive plan includes 37 recommendations, ranging from a significant legislative agenda to continued work on a number of issues raised during the forums. Commission members will encourage legislators to adopt the legislative proposals recommended in the plan. These initiatives include:

- Requiring the installation of locking devices on all anhydrous ammonia tanks.
- Increasing the Office of Attorney General's appropriation to add additional agents for narcotics task forces.
- Moving the crime laboratory from the Department of Health to the Office of Attorney General.
- Limiting the amount of ephedrine and ephedrine-related products that may be purchased from a retail establishment.
- Enhancing the penalty for possession of methamphetamine when dangerous weapons are present.
- Re-aligning mandated coverage for substance abuse treatment with current best practice.
- Establishing a funding mechanism to allow specialized teams from urban areas to assist rural law enforcement raids on methamphetamine labs and other specialized forces situations.
- Amending present child endangerment laws to address the safety of children living in environments where methamphetamine is manufactured.
- Establishing the criminal justice information sharing board and encouraging the development of a central repository for criminal justice information (SB 2041).

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The second phase will include:

Work on each of the remaining recommendations, including –

- An in-depth examination of funding sources to combat substance abuse, parameters for spending and new funding opportunities.
- Discussions with tribal leaders about treatment and prevention funding options, statistical reporting and licensing of addiction counselors.
- The Commission will facilitate the efforts of a special work group tasked with developing a comprehensive plan to update the addiction treatment system in North Dakota.

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